

From: Eric Laffoon
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/23/02 12:49pm
Subject: Preserve our future by restraining a bully

Hello,

I've read that you are still receiving comments by law in this case. As someone who has suffered long with Microsoft I would like to say something. While the outcome of the case is decided it is meaningless without applying penalty and restriction. Perhaps there may be some restraint looking fully into their history? during the trial there were many people paraded through telling of the "trail of broken bodies" left by Microsoft tactics. The fact that they have been in antitrust litigation three times in the last decade (if memory serves) is telling. What it says is "all previous attempts to restrain illegal monopolistic behavior have failed".

Here is one brief illustration from the early 90s of what to expect. I was working on a business proposal on a friends DOS based computer and saved it to a file. I went to import it to a Microsoft word document at Kinkos. It tried to save the document to the floppy as the imported file. However the Word document was so bloated (big surprise) that it would not fit and it produced an error dialog saying it could not be saved with a button saying "OK". But it was not okay! It was an endless loop and did not even offer me to abort. This is just plain terrible programming.

During this time Lotus Ami Pro was a PC Magazine editor's choice three years running. They achieved, if memory serves, less than 5% market share. certainly less than 10%. Finally Microsoft produced a version that beat them and Ami Pro drifted into history. Why did people choose word? Because while Ami Pro could read and write Word documents Word could not write Ami Pro. Because people are inherently too lazy to be expected to remember to select a document type when they save a file Ami Pro was considered "incompatible" when in fact it was the other way around. During this time the other prevailing attitude was that as flakey as software was you were safer with Microsoft since at least they knew the internals of Windows.

Two years later I read that the KNOWN bug that had ruined my day had been fixed in a maintenance release of the next version of Word. I encountered the problem on 1.0. I believe the release was 2.04g. Why did it take so long? Wasn't the focus on quality software? No! It was on a fractured feature set that would sufficiently impress journalists that did not actually use the programs for work... This would be read by managers who did not actually understand the programs who would then sign purchase orders. Of course none of this mattered that much since the bundled Office with everything back then.

Currently I use Linux. I do so for several reasons. One is that during the 90s I computed the cost of down time from Windows and realized i could have bought a new computer every few months with the money I was losing. I also found that Microsoft software was far less efficient and more expensive than

other solutions. Among those I found that free software was actually what the internet was based upon and it allowed me to have far more software than I could ever afford. I now receive documents in proprietary Microsoft formats. It is assumed everyone has them. I have to use other programs that can read them... painfully aware that mild encryption or some absurd patent (like Amazon's "One Click") could litigate away even free and open solutions.

Document formats of information exchange should be free and open formats like HTML or structured XML. They should fall under standards committees so that more than one player could be there. At the very least they should be published if they are proprietary... especially if they are from a company found guilty of abusing monopoly status.

The future of our world hangs in the balance. Not since Gutenberg introduced movable type has there been such an opportunity to make such cultural and information based leaps in society. The internet offers so much to so many... but a company with total control of information formats and with the low morals and ruthlessness demonstrated by Microsoft puts that at risk. If their monopoly is codified by a limp settlement what will happen? The PC market is pretty flat and rather expensive to pursue... but the internet, if key parts could be subverted, could be a cash resource for them like no other.

If you do not serve to protect the interest of the American people (and in this case really the whole world) where shall we turn? I implore you to stop the bully.

Force them to open their file formats!
Restrict their advances into other monopolies!
Put some teeth in any review board formed!
Take action to limit their demonstrated behaviors!
Think about forcing them to make restitution to consumers. Actions must have consequences and we look to you to protect our interests.

Thank you for your attention.

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